

Article Details

Firaaq - A Poignant Debut

by Preeti Thandi

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Nandita Das' directorial debut *Firaaq* is a moving exploration of religious, cultural and social strife in the time of violence. The title of the film signifies both quest and separation.



Much like her acting finesse, Das carefully moves behind the camera to create picture perfect shots. Even though the film deals with an intense and disturbing storyline one cannot help but be drawn to the visual appeal and imagery of the film. For Das, the Toronto International Film Festival was her first ever festival experience when she came here for Deepa Mehta's *Fire*. Subsequently many films and festivals later she is back this year with her very first creative offering as a director.

Firaaq, which encapsulates a multilayered divide, pieces together five different stories. The film lays bare the turmoil of the characters as their lives take a distressing turn in the aftermath of the 2002 communal violence in Gujarat.

Muneera (Shahana Goswami) and Hanif (Nowaz) a young Muslim couple return to their home after hiding in a safe neighborhood for a month. They are horrified and enraged to find their home in ruins, their belongings destroyed and their savings gone. As they try to make some sense of their situation they are both gripped with rage and suspicion. Muneera is convinced that her best friend Jyoti who happens to be a Hindu knows it all. Meanwhile Hanif sets out to seek revenge.

Das who was totally consumed by her directorial experience reveals that the stories compelled her. "While I wanted to be a director, the stories came to me," says Das. "These stories compelled me, not so much the violence and I felt compelled to tell them." **Firaaq** is based on a thousand true stories.

Sanjay (Paresh Rawal) and Arati (Deepti Naval) are a Hindu couple. Sanjay is a chauvinist and treats his wife with no respect. While Sanjay seems to be making the most of the chaos in the city his wife is hounded by the cries of a woman she did not save from the rioters. Instead of showing too much violence Das focuses on the repercussions effectively creating an unnerving impact.

An unconventional mixed marriage couple, Anu (Tisca Chopra) and Sameer (Sanjay Suri) are caught up in a strife of their own. They have been inadvertently affected as they question their identity and even their relationships.

An aging classical vocalist, Khan Saheb (Naseeruddin Shah) is probably the most unaffected, partially because he isn't aware and mainly because music knows no divide. His loyal servant Karim (Raghubir Yadav), shields him from the harsh realities of the day because of Khan Saheb's ill health and also because he doesn't want to defeat his optimism.

In her first film Das not only achieves visual perfection but has also done a wonderful job of directing veteran actors. "Being an actor helps," she says.

Amid the disorder a little boy Mohsin (Samad) sets out to find his father after losing his family in the bloodshed. Mohsin has seen it all and perhaps his loss is the greatest in the film, the loss of innocence.

Given the admiration of Das' acting talent, the film will evoke a lot of interest at festivals and possibly controversy following its' release in India.

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